

# The MHT Archeological Synthesis Project

Office of Research, Survey and Registration

## Overview

The MHT Archeological Synthesis Project was launched in 2007 by the Maryland Historical Trust Board of Trustees (with additional funding provided by the MD State Highway Administration) to begin the process of synthesizing data from the thousands of excavation projects that have been conducted in Maryland over the past few decades. It consists of a searchable database that is linked to our Maryland Archeological Site Survey files, but is also tied to synopsis reports and cover sheets generated by reviewing each larger excavation project. The synopsis reports contain a capsule summary of the overall site report, organized in a way that makes it easier for researchers to quickly pull out the most relevant information they would need for reconstructing the past activities at a site. The cover sheets deal more with the history of archeological activity at a site: specifically the justifications for fieldwork, research objectives, and the potential for future research at the locale.



## Project Justification

Since passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), governmental agencies across the country have been required to evaluate the impact of all government-assisted construction projects on archeological resources. As a result, numerous survey and site excavation reports have been generated over the last 50 years, producing an ever growing amount of archeological data. The documentation presented in those reports may be all that tangibly remains of an important site once it is destroyed.



- With the focus on project-specific data collecting, there has been **little time or funding for broad regional synthesis**, so that a given site can be compared to others around it and discussed within a broader context.
- **Every year** approximately **100 new archeological reports** are added to the MHT Library. Like most states, Maryland has struggled with the issue of how to make this important “gray literature” more accessible.
- These reports often consist of **hundreds of pages each**, many with multiple volumes and extensive appendices.
- The Synthesis Project has focused on reviewing sites where extensive work has been carried out, beyond the level of survey (sites that have been examined at a Phase II or Phase III level of research).

The MHT synthesis project takes these original **Phase II** and **Phase III** reports, condenses the data into manageable synopsis reports (avg. 4-5 pages) that are keyword searchable. The end result is that researchers will be able to readily acquire and compare critical data from sites throughout the entire state. Regional chronologies, our understanding of artifact distributions, comparison of site types, and our knowledge of prehistory and history will all benefit. The synthesized data will help redirect future investigations to examine data gaps, provide readily accessible comparative data to enable informed National Register evaluations, and focus research questions to target important issues for data recovery efforts. Additional products will be overview volumes aimed toward the general public, on the *Prehistory of Maryland* and the *Archeology of Colonial Maryland*.

For more information about the Archeological Synthesis Project please contact:

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### Design

Each site that has been the subject of a Phase II or a Phase III archeological investigation is summarized in a **site synopsis report**. All of the data, from all phases of research at the site, are combined into a single site report. The list below provides some (but not all) of the major categories of data being included in the synopsis reports. In addition, a project cover sheet is prepared to summarize the entire compliance project (e.g., road widening, prison construction, housing development, etc.). The project cover sheet summarizes the archeological work undertaken for the project, research questions addressed, and other useful information. These reports and cover sheets are archived as PDFs and can be explored using our simple search form (seen below).

<i>Geographic Coordinates*</i>	<i>Local Environmental Data</i>	<i>Nearby Water Sources</i>
<i>Temporal Context (Culture Period)</i>	<i>Ethnic Associations (Historic)</i>	<i>Site Function</i>
<i>Urban vs. Rural (Historic)</i>	<i>Presence/Absence of Dated Features</i>	<i>Flotation Sample Data</i>
<i>Soil Sample Data</i>	<i>C-14 Sample Data &amp; Assessment</i>	<i>Architectural Info</i>
<i>Diagnostic Earthenware Sherd Counts</i>	<i>Porcelain Sherd Counts</i>	<i>Diagnostic Stoneware Sherd Counts</i>
<i>Industrial/Commercial/Activities Represented</i>	<i>South's Artifact Class Counts</i>	<i>Rough Counts of Other Artifact Types</i>
<i>Diagnostic Projectile Point Counts</i>	<i>Diagnostic Prehistoric Sherd Counts</i>	<i>Lithic Materials</i>
<i>Presence/Absence of Human Remains</i>	<i>Prehistoric Feature Types</i>	<i>Historic Feature Types</i>
<i>Collection Curation Info</i>	<i>Site Summary Discussion</i>	<i>Links to External Raw Data</i>


(\*precise coordinates available to qualified researchers only, "rough" coordinates may be available to a broader audience)

### Use and Access

Use of the Synthesis Database is currently available to researchers who meet the Office of Archeology's qualification standards to access archeological resources in the [MHT Library](#). The database is being designed with the long-term goal of making the information accessible to a wide range of users including federal, state, and local government archeologists, private consultants, academic researchers, and the general public via the internet. In the near future, password-protected access to the full database will be enabled for qualified researchers via the MHT website, while a version of the database with site locations restricted will be made available to the general public.

Current library patrons can access the database by logging onto one of the two PC workstations in the MHT Library with the yellow "Synthesis Project" monitor labels.



- Double click the icon that looks like a trowel  to open Microsoft Access and the synthesis search form (seen above). Click the "Launch Search" button and fill out the search form.
- Click the "Search" button once all of your parameters are entered. The right-hand side of the search form lists search operators, while the link at the top lets you browse reports and cover sheets. It can take up to 1 minute for a given search to run. Also, don't forget to clear the form between searches!

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